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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: May 16, 1955

SUBJECT: UK reaction to US Policy (NSC 5404/1).

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. F. J. Leishman, British Embassy  
Mr. Cecil B. Lyon - GER

COPIES TO: EUR - Mr. Elbrick  
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Berlin  
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Mr. Leishman called and said that the Foreign Office had now instructed the British Embassy, in response to the Embassy's telegram setting forth our views concerning actions in case of a possible future blockade of Berlin (see memo of conversation between Mr. Elbrick and Mr. Leishman, dated May 10) as follows:

- (1) The Foreign Office agrees in principle with the US position and particularly that there should be further consultation as to possible courses of action.
- (2) The Foreign Office would like to know what the US Government has in mind when it refers to possible use of limited military force.
- (3) The Foreign Office believes that discussions on this matter should be postponed until after the scheduled meeting between the USSR High Commissioner, Pushkin, and the three Western Allied Ambassadors.

The British Embassy has also had a telegram from the British Ambassador in Bonn indicating that he, too, in principle agrees with the US point of view. However, he stated he did not anticipate another blockade and he had no reason to expect further serious steps to interfere with the communications to Berlin. Therefore, while considering and planning is entirely in order, Sir Derick Hoyer-Millar would prefer to postpone such planning until after the Pushkin meeting.

In attempting to elucidate as to what the Department had in mind in reference to the possible use of limited military force, I said that as we had indicated previously we thought this was a matter which had best be decided by the Military but that our objective was to continue to make clear to the USSR that the Western Powers will maintain their position in Berlin and that Soviet measures

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-2-

challenging that position will be forcefully and promptly resisted. I said that this probably entailed, in agreement with the other Occupying Powers, such action as was necessary to determine Soviet intentions and to demonstrate Allied refusal voluntarily to relinquish their right of access to Berlin.

Mr. Leishman then asked, "You don't think an airlift is sufficient for that?" I replied that an airlift might be sufficient to demonstrate our intentions to remain in Berlin but that on the other hand it might not. Conditions have greatly improved since 1948. Berlin was much more prosperous and an airlift probably wouldn't permit the Berlin economy to continue at its level of prosperity. Therefore, to avoid a lowering of morale in Berlin we might have to take more forceful measures. I said that we certainly would want to ascertain first whether the Soviets were bluffing. This would entail probably some probing action. As Mr. Leishman would recall, I continued, at the time of the 1948-49 blockade, many felt that if we had run an armored column or armed trucks through, this would have broken the blockade. Just as many felt that such a venture would have proved futile inasmuch as the Soviets could have put a bridge out of operation and this could have terminated the operation.

I said that while I thought our planning was largely academic because I, too, did not feel that the Soviets were moving toward a blockade at this juncture, nevertheless if one should occur what we would want to do would be to see how determined the Soviets were and then see whether we were prepared to use forceful means to terminate it. We realize that this might have the gravest of consequences, possibly war, but that in any event I thought that we should be studying and planning as to what we should do in the event of another blockade, for really none of us had ever faced up to this question of how far we would be prepared to go.

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